

[William] Youngren states that it was his hearing of this *Götterdämmerung* in the early 1980s that first led him to understand why some of us had long been great admirers of Knappertsbusch—and one can certainly see how this performance would have been a powerful weapon of persuasion. Knappertsbusch could be a maddeningly uneven conductor (from performance to performance, and within the same performance), but this is the finest of his surviving Bayreuth *Ring* Cycles. Two later ones, from 1957 and 1958, fail to achieve the consistency of inspiration and cogency of shape, not to mention incisiveness and intensity, that are found in this 1956 production.

What is it that makes this performance unique? Well, first there is the singing—this was a time when these operas could still be cast with singers who had the vocal equipment and the understanding of the style to do full justice to Wagner's scores. I realize that we have been bemoaning the loss of Nilsson for a long time now—and yes, I'd love to have her likes again. But failing that, I'd be thrilled to have a Varnay. Here was a powerful, gleaming dramatic soprano who could negotiate the music without ever forcing her voice, and who knew how to shade and color the music in a way that brought out the human qualities in Brunnhilde. It is true that she is vocally a bit unsteady in the first half of the *Siegfried* duet, but that music is a trial for a soprano who doesn't sing a note all night until then, and she does settle down for the final push. Her big scenes with Wotan (act II of *Die Walküre* and act III of *Götterdämmerung*) and with Siegmund (act II of *Die Walküre*) reveal her to be an intelligent, communicative artist who fully engages with others in meaningful dramatic exchanges. How nice to find that and the vocal heft too!

Windgassen is a marvelous Siegfried, managing to retain his voice throughout both operas and to sing with more beauty of tone than we usually associate with him. That he knows his way around the role, and inflects it with specificity of characterization, is no surprise. What is disappointing is his assumption of the role of Siegmund in *Walküre*, which he did on almost no notice when Ramon Vinay was taken ill. He sounds tired, and sings flat in both acts I and II. The worst ensemble mess in the entire cycle takes place between him and Knappertsbusch immediately after Sieglinde's "Der manner Sippe." It goes on for quite a while and dilutes the impact of the end of the first act.

The other great asset is, as you would expect, Hans Hotter, who conveys the complexity of the character of Wotan more completely than any other bass-baritone of the postwar era. The voice is far steadier here than it was for Solti on London's *Ring*, though even here his strengths are in musical-dramatic values, not in steady tone production. (In the latter regard, he is stronger in the 1953 Krauss cycle.) The mixture of anger, anguish, tenderness, and love in his feelings for his favorite daughter are crystallized as with no other singer, and he had the variety of color and inflection to maintain one's interest throughout Wotan's long monolog in act II of *Walküre*, given here uncut. Wotan also has a unique combination of arrogance, haughtiness, and humility, and I have never encountered a singer who encapsulated it all as well. Hotter embodies the spirit of Reynaldo Hahn's wonderful dictum on singing: "The genuine beauty of singing consists in a perfect union, an amalgam, a mysterious alloy of the singing and the speaking voice, or, to put it better, the melody and the spoken word."

Henry Fogel, *Fanfare* magazine, 1998 (Part 1 - review continues in notes to *Siegfried*)



disc one
(79:07)

ACT ONE

1. Prelude (3:20)

SCENE ONE

2. Wes Herd dies auch sei, hier muss ich rasten (3:35)

3. Kühnende Labung Gab Mir Der Quell! (4:25)

4. Einen Unseligen labtest du (4:06)

SCENE TWO

5. Müd am Herd fand ich den Mann (5:02)

6. Friedman darf ich nicht heissen (5:53)

7. Die so leidig Los dir beschied (4:23)

8. Ich weiss ein wildes Geschlecht (5:52)

SCENE THREE

9. Ein Schwert verhies mir der Vater (4:51)

10. Schläfst du, Gast? (6:51)

11. Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond (2:57)

12. Du bist der Lenz, nach dem ich verlangte (2:04)

13. O süsseste Wonne! Seligstes Weib! (6:15)

14. Siegmund heiss ich und Siegmund bin ich! (4:26)

ACT TWO

15. Prelude - Nun zäume dein Ross, reisige Maid! (2:38)

SCENE ONE

16. Ho-jo-to-ho! Ho-jo-to-ho! (2:40)

17. Der alte Sturm, die alte Muh'! (3:53)

18. Heut hast du's erlebt (1:01)

19. So ist es denn aus mit den ewigen Göttern (3:36)

20. Nichts lerntest du (1:17)

disc two
(78:35)

1. Mit tiefem Sinne willst du mich täuschen (7:08)

2. Heiaha! Heiaha! Hojotoho! (2:44)

SCENE TWO

3. Schlimm, fürcht ich, schloss der Streit (5:06)

4. Als junger Liebe Lust mir verblich (5:01)

5. Ein andres ist's: achte es wohl! (9:51)

6. So nimm meinen Segen, Nibelungen-Sohn! (5:15)

7. So sah ich Siegvater nie (3:07)

SCENE THREE

8. Raste nun hier; gönne dir Ruh! (3:32)

9. Hinweg! Hinweg! Flieh die Entweihte! (7:45)

SCENE FOUR

10. Siegmund! Sieh auf mich! (8:07)

11. Erdenluft muss sie noch atmen (3:40)

12. Weh! Weh! Süssestes Weib (4:17)

13. Zwei Leben lachen dir hier (2:39)

SCENE FIVE

14. Zauberfest bezähmt ein Schlaf (5:02)

15. Wehwalt! Wehwalt! (5:20)

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KNAPPERTSBUCH, BAYREUTH FESTIVAL 1956

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wagner

die walküre

CAST

Siegmond - Wolfgang Windgassen
Sieglinde - Gré Brouwenstijn
Wotan - Hans Hotter
Brünnhilde - Astrid Varnay
Hunding - Josef Greindl
Fricka - Georgine von Milinkovic
Gerhilde - Paula Lenchner
Ortlinde - Gerda Lammers
Waltraute - Elisabeth Schärtel
Schwertleite - Maria von Ilosvay
Helmwige - Hilde Scheppan
Siegfrune - Luise Charlotte Kamps
Grimgerde - Georgine von Milinkovic
Roßweiße - Jean Madeira

Chorus and Orchestra of the Bayreuther Festspiele
conducted by Hans Knappertsbusch

Recorded live at Bayreuth, 14 August, 1956

Ambient Stereo XR remastering by: Andrew Rose
Cover artwork: based on a photograph of Hans Knappertsbusch

Total duration: 3hr 50:30



disc three
(72:48)

ACT THREE

1. Wulkurenritt - The Ride of the Valkyries (9:13)

SCENE ONE

2. Schütz mich und helft in höchster Not! (3:46)
3. Nicht sehre dich Sorge um mich (6:17)
4. Steh, Brünnhild'! (0:51)

SCENE TWO

5. Wo ist Brünnhild', wo die Verbrecherin! (4:10)
6. Hier bin ich, Vater: gebiete die Strafe! (9:14)

SCENE THREE

7. War es so schmäählich, was ich verbrach (4:54)
8. Nicht weise bin ich, doch wusst' ich das Eine (5:21)
9. So tatest du, was so gern zu tun ich begehrt (2:36)
10. Deinen leichten Sinn lass dich denn leiten (4:05)
11. Du zeugtest ein edles Geschlecht (5:46)
12. Leb wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind! (5:04)
13. Der Augen leuchtendes Paar (5:46)
14. Loge, hör! Lausche hieher! (5:47)

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